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THE

WESTERN SENTINEL.

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The President's Message.

With this issue we conclude our extract from the message of the President, and have now given the document almost entire. His references to the reports of the Heads of the several departments we omit, as they will fail to interest the great mass of our readers.

THE GOVERNMENT AND THE FREEDMEN.

The relations of the general government towards the four millions of inhabitants whom the war has called into freedom, have engaged my most serious consideration. On the propriety of attempting to make the freedmen electors by the proclamation of the executive, I took for my counsel the constitution itself, the interpretations of that instrument by its authors and their contemporaries, and recent legislation by congress. When, at the first movement towards independence the congress of the United States instructed the several states to institute governments of their own, they left each state to decide for itself the conditions for the enjoyment of the elective franchise.

During the period of the confederacy, there continued to exist a very great diversity in the qualifications of electors in the several states, and even within a state a distinction of qualifications prevailed with regard to the officers who were to be chosen. The constitution of the United States recognizes those diversities when it enjoins that, in the choice of members of the house of representatives of the United States, "the electors in each state shall have the qualifications requisite for electors of the most numerous branch of the state legislature." After the formation of the constitution, it remained, as before, the uniform usage for each state to enlarge the body of its electors, according to its own judgment; and, under this system, one state after another has proceeded to increase the number of its electors, until now universal suffrage, or something very near to it, is the general rule.

So fixed was this reservation of power in the habits of the people, and so unquestioned has been the interpretation of the constitution, that during the civil war the late president never harbored the purpose—certainly never avowed the purpose—of disregarding it; and in the acts of congress, during that period, nothing can be found which, during the continuance of hostilities, much less after their close, would have sanctioned any departure by the executive from a policy which has so uniformly obtained.

Moreover, a concession of the elective franchise to the freedmen, by act of the president of the United States, must have been extended to all colored men, wherever found, and so must have established a change of suffrage in the northern, middle and western states, not less than in the southern and southwestern. Such an act would have created a new class of voters, and would have been an assumption of power by the president which nothing in the constitution or laws of the United States would have warranted.

THE QUESTION OF FRANCHISE REFERRED TO THE STATES.

On the other hand, every danger of conflict is avoided when the settlement of the question is referred to the several states. They can, each for itself, decide on the measure, and whether it is to be adopted at once and absolutely, or introduced gradually and with conditions. In my judgement, the freedmen, if they show patience and manly virtues, will sooner obtain a participation in the elective franchise through the states than through the general government, even if it had power to intervene.

When the tumult of emotions that have been raised by the suddenness of the social change shall have subsided, it may prove that they will receive the kindliest protection from some of those on whom they have heretofore entirely depended.

PROTECTION TO THE FREEDMEN.

But while I have no doubt, that now, after the close of the war, it is not competent for the general government to extend the elective franchise in the several states, it is equally clear that good faith requires the security of the freedmen in their liberty and their property, their right to labor, and their right to claim the just return of their labor. I cannot too strongly urge a dispassionate treatment of this subject, which should be carefully kept aloof from all party strife. We must equally avoid hasty assumptions of any natural impossibility for the two races to live side by side, in a state of mutual benefit and good will. The experiment involves us in no inconsistency; let us then, go on and make that experiment in good faith, and not be too easily disheartened. The country is in need of labor, and the freedmen are in need of employment, culture and protection. While their right of voluntary migration and expatriation is not to be questioned, I would not advise their forced removal and colonization.

Let us rather encourage them to honorable and useful industry, where it may be beneficial to themselves and to the country; and, instead of hasty anticipations of the certainty of failure, let there be nothing wanting to the fair trial of the experiment. The change in their condition is the substitution of labor by contract for the status of slavery. The freedman cannot fairly be accused of unwillingness to work, so long as a doubt remains about his freedom of choice in his pursuits, and the certainty of his recovering his stipulated wages. In this the interests of the employer and the employed coincide.

The employer desires in his workmen spirit and alacrity, and these can be permanently secured in no other way. And if the one ought to be able to enforce the contract, so ought the other. The public interest will be best promoted if the several states will provide adequate protection and remedies for the freedmen. Until this is in some way accomplished, there is no chance for the advantageous use of their labor; and the blame of ill-success will not rest on them.

I know that sincere philanthropy is earnest for the immediate realization of its remotest aims; but time is always an element in reform. It is one of the greatest acts on record to have brought four millions of people into freedom. The career of free industry must be fairly opened to them; and then their future prosperity and condition must, after all, rest mainly on themselves. If they fail, and so perish away, let us be careful that the failure shall not be attributable to any denial of justice. In all that relates to the destiny of the freedmen, we need not be too anxious to read the future; many incidents which, from a speculative point of view, might raise alarm, will quietly settle themselves.

ADVANTAGE OF FREE LABOR.

Now that slavery is at an end, or near its end, the greatness of its evil, in the point of view of public economy, becomes more and more apparent. Slavery was essentially a monopoly of labor, and as such locked the states where it prevailed against the incoming of free industry.—Where labor was the property of the capitalist, the white man was excluded from employment, or had but the second best chance of finding it, and the foreign emigrant turned away from the region where his condition would be so precarious.—With the destruction of the monopoly, free labor will hasten from all parts of the civilized world to assist in developing various and immeasureable resources which have hitherto lain dormant.

The eight or nine states nearest the Gulf of Mexico have a soil of exuberent fertility, a climate friendly to long life, and can ststain a denser population than is found as yet in any part of our country. And the future influx of population to them will be mainly from the north, or from the most cultivated nations in Europe. From the sufferings that have attended them during our late struggle, let us look away to the future, which is sure to be laden for them with greater prosperity than has ever before been known. The removal of the monopoly of slave labor is a pledge that those regions will be peopled by a numerous and enterprising population, which will vie with any in the Union in compactness, inventive genius, wealth and industry.

Our government springs from and was made for the people—not the people for the government. To them it owes allegiance; from them it must derive its courage, strength and wisdom. But, while the government is thus bound to defer to the people, from whom it derives its existence, it should, from the very consideration of its origin, be strong in its power of resistance to the establishment of inequalities. Monopolies, perpetuities and class legislation are contrary to the genius of free government, and ought not to be allowed. Here there is no room for favored classes or monopolies, the principle of our government is that of equal laws and freedom of industry.

Whenever monopoly attains a foothold, it is sure to be a source of danger, discord and trouble. We shall but fulfill our duties as legislators by according "equal and exact justice to all men," special privileges to none. The government is subordinate to the people; but, as the agent and representative of the people, it must be held superior to monopolies, which in themselves, ought never to be granted, and which, where they exist, must be subordinate and yield to the government.

UNRESTRICTED COMMERCE BETWEEN THE STATES.

The constitution confers on congress the right to regulate commerce among the several states. It is of the first necessity, for the maintenance of the Union, that commerce should be free and unobstructed. No state can be justified in any device to tax the transit of travel and commerce between states. The position of many states is such that, if they were allowed to take advantage of it for purposes of local revenue, the commerce between states might be injuriously burdoned, or even virtually prohibited.

It is best, while the country is still young, and while the tendency to dangerous monopolies of this kind is still feeble, to use the power of congress so as to prevent any selfish impediment to the free circulation of men and merchandise. A tax on travel and merchandise, in their transit, constitutes one of the worst forms of monopoly, and the evil is increased if coupled with a denial of the choice of route. When the vast extent of our country is considered, it is plain that every obstacle to the free circulation of commerce between the states ought to be sternly guarded against by appropriate legislation, within the limits of the constitution.

THE GROWTH AND PROSPERITY OF THE COUNTRY.

When, on the organization of our government, under the constitution, the President of the United States delivered his inaugural address to the two houses of congress, he said to them, and through them to the country and to mankind, that "the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered as deeply, perhaps as finally staked on the experiment intrusted to the American people."

And the house of representatives answered Washington by the voice of Madison: "We adore the invisible hand which has led the American people, through so many difficulties, to cherish a conscious responsibility for the destiny of republican liberty." More than seventy-six years have glided away since these words were spoken, the United States have passed through severer trials than were foreseen; and now, at this new epoch in our existence as one nation, with our union purified by sorrows, and strengthened by conflict, and established by the virtue of the people, the greatness of the occasion invites us once more to repeat, with solemnity, the pledges of our fathers to hold ourselves answerable before our fellow-men for the success of the republican form of government.

Experience has proved its sufficiency in peace and in war; it has vindicated its authority through dangers and afflictions, and sudden and terrible emergencies, which would have shaken any system that had been less firmly fixed in the heart of the people. At the inauguration of Washington the foreign relations of the country were few, and its trade was repressed by hostile regulations; now all the civilized nations of the globe welcome our commerce, and their governments profess towards us amity.

Then our country felt its way hesitatingly along an untried path, with states so little bound together by rapid means of communication as to be hardly known to one another, and with historic traditions extending over very few years; now intercourse between the states is swift and intimate; the experience of centuries has been crowded into a few generations, and has created an intense, indestructible nationality.

Then our jurisdiction did not reach beyond the inconvenient boundaries of the territory which had achieved independence; now through concessions of lands, first colonized by Spain and France, the country has acquired a more complex character, and has for its natural limits the chain of Lakes, the Gulf of Mexico, and on the east and west the two great oceans.

Other nations were wasted by civil wars for ages before they could establish for themselves the necessary degree of unity; the latent conviction that our form of government is the best ever known to the world, has enabled us to emerge from civil war within four years, with a complete vindication of the constitutional authority of the general government, and with our local liberties and state institutions unimpaired.

The throngs of emigrants that crowd to our shores are witnesses of the confidence of all peoples in our permanence.—Here is the great land of free labor, where industry is blessed with unexampled rewards, and the bread of the workingman is sweetened by the consciousness that the cause of the country "is his own cause, his own safety, his own dignity." Here every one enjoys the free use of his faculties and choice of activity as a natural right.

Here, under the combined influence of a fruitful soil, genial climes, and happy institutions, population has increased fifteen-fold within a century. Here, through the easy development of boundless resources, wealth has increased with two-fold greater rapidity than numbers, so that we have become secure against the financial vicissitudes of other countries, and, alike in business and in opinion, are self-centred and truly independent.

Here more and more care is given to provide education for every one born on our soil. Here religion, released from political connection with the civil government, refuses to subserve the craft of statesmen, and becomes, in its independence, the spiritual life of the people.—Here toleration is extended to every opinion, in the quiet certainty that truth needs only a fair field to secure the victory.—Here the human mind goes forth unshackled in the pursuit of science, to collect stores of knowledge and acquire an ever-increasing mastery over the forces of nature.